

## Complete Summary

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### GUIDELINE TITLE

Helping children and families deal with divorce and separation.

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCE(S)

Cohen GJ. Helping children and families deal with divorce and separation.  
Pediatrics 2002 Nov; 110(5):1019-23. [38 references] [PubMed](#)

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## SCOPE

### DISEASE/CONDITION(S)

Clinical manifestations of divorce in children

### GUIDELINE CATEGORY

Counseling  
Prevention  
Risk Assessment

### CLINICAL SPECIALTY

Family Practice  
Nursing  
Pediatrics  
Psychiatry  
Psychology

### INTENDED USERS

Advanced Practice Nurses  
Health Care Providers  
Nurses  
Physician Assistants  
Physicians

#### GUIDELINE OBJECTIVE(S)

To present recommendations for helping children and families deal with divorce and separation

#### TARGET POPULATION

Children of all ages and their parents

#### INTERVENTIONS AND PRACTICES CONSIDERED

1. Prevention
  - Inquiring about family stressors during child development counseling
  - Referring for counseling
2. Anticipatory Guidance
  - Parent conferences
  - Assessment of support for family and child(ren)
  - Offering pertinent written material on divorce
  - Counseling regarding custody
3. Long-term Follow-up
  - Ongoing assessment
  - Reporting abuse

#### MAJOR OUTCOMES CONSIDERED

- School performance
- Behavioral difficulties
- Social withdrawal
- Somatic complaints
- Depression

### METHODOLOGY

#### METHODS USED TO COLLECT/SELECT EVIDENCE

Searches of Electronic Databases

#### DESCRIPTION OF METHODS USED TO COLLECT/SELECT THE EVIDENCE

Not stated

#### NUMBER OF SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Not stated

## METHODS USED TO ASSESS THE QUALITY AND STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Expert Consensus

## RATING SCHEME FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Not applicable

## METHODS USED TO ANALYZE THE EVIDENCE

Review

## DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODS USED TO ANALYZE THE EVIDENCE

Not stated

## METHODS USED TO FORMULATE THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Not stated

## RATING SCHEME FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable

## COST ANALYSIS

A formal cost analysis was not performed and published cost analyses were not reviewed.

## METHOD OF GUIDELINE VALIDATION

Peer Review

## DESCRIPTION OF METHOD OF GUIDELINE VALIDATION

Not stated

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be alert to warning signs of dysfunctional marriage and impending separation.
- Discuss family functioning in anticipatory guidance and offer advice pertinent to divorce as appropriate.
- Always be the child's advocate, offering support and age-appropriate advice to the child and parents regarding reactions to divorce, especially guilt, anger, sadness, and perceived loss of love.

- Try to maintain positive relationships with both parents rather than taking sides. If there is evidence of an abusive situation, referral to child protective services is indicated.
- Encourage open discussion about separation and divorce with and between parents, emphasizing ways to deal with children's reactions and identifying appropriate reading materials.
- Refer families to mental health resources with expertise in divorce if necessary.
- Become familiar with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Primary Care (DSM-PC) Child and Adolescent Version and review the diagnostic criteria carefully so that a specific and appropriate diagnosis is used when helping children and families deal with separation and divorce (refer to Appendix 1 in the original guideline document).

#### CLINICAL ALGORITHM(S)

None provided

### EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TYPE OF EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The type of evidence supporting the recommendations is not specifically stated.

### BENEFITS/HARMS OF IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDELINE RECOMMENDATIONS

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- When pediatricians counsel the family regarding issues of child development and behavior, areas of marital discord or stress are often uncovered. Addressing these stressors directly or referring for marital counseling is appropriate and may preserve the marital relationship.
- If the marriage is to end, early interventions can aim to decrease parental hostility and assist the child and parents in coping with family disruptions to come.
- The pediatrician may have a role in preserving the intact family when appropriate or decreasing morbidity related to separations that occur.

#### POTENTIAL HARMS

Not stated

### QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

#### QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINE

### DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

An implementation strategy was not provided.

## INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE (IOM) NATIONAL HEALTHCARE QUALITY REPORT CATEGORIES

### IOM CARE NEED

Getting Better  
Staying Healthy

### IOM DOMAIN

Effectiveness  
Patient-centeredness

## IDENTIFYING INFORMATION AND AVAILABILITY

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCE(S)

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### ADAPTATION

Not applicable: The guideline was not adapted from another source.

### DATE RELEASED

2002 Nov

### GUIDELINE DEVELOPER(S)

American Academy of Pediatrics - Medical Specialty Society

### SOURCE(S) OF FUNDING

American Academy of Pediatrics

### GUIDELINE COMMITTEE

Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health

### COMPOSITION OF GROUP THAT AUTHORED THE GUIDELINE

Committee Members, 2002-2003: Joseph F. Hagan, Jr, MD, Chairperson; William L. Coleman, MD; Jane M. Foy, MD; Edward Goldson, MD; Ana Navarro, MD; Thomas J. Sullivan, MD; J. Lane Tanner, MD

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#### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES/CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Not stated

#### GUIDELINE STATUS

This is the current release of the guideline.

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Policies are reviewed every 3 years by the authoring body, at which time a recommendation is made that the policy be retired, revised, or reaffirmed without change. Until the Board of Directors approves a revision or reaffirmation, or retires a statement, the current policy remains in effect.

#### GUIDELINE AVAILABILITY

Electronic copies: Available from the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) Policy Web site](#).

Print copies: Available from American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Blvd., P.O. Box 927, Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927.

#### AVAILABILITY OF COMPANION DOCUMENTS

None available

#### PATIENT RESOURCES

None available

#### NGC STATUS

This NGC summary was completed by ECRI on May 15, 2003. The information was verified by the guideline developer on June 9, 2003.

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